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County Land Use Planning

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THE SAME era that brought to many farms the benefits of automobiles, motortrucks, tractors, electricity, radio, and good roads also brought the end of free lands and a declining foreign demand for the produce of new acres. It brought the farmer face to face with problems of low income and of soil depletion and erosion. It brought the Nation face to face with the fact that land resources, wrongly managed, are exhaustible and that we have been exhausting them at a rapid rate.

Failing markets and depressed prices for farm produce impelled the individual farmer to cut costs and to produce as much as he could for as little as he could. It was hard on the farmer and hard on the land. It was hard on the rest of the Nation as well, for the farmer, receiving little for his produce, was able to buy little of what city workers produced. Both town and country suffered.

In addition to current problems, in the future hung the specter of vast regions turned into wastes by deforestation and by wind and water erosion.

No longer was the farm problem the old one of how each farmer could produce more at less cost. Congress, in a series of enactments, directed the establishment of national programs to help people on the land conserve the soil, to help farmers own their own lands, to help needy farmers make a better living, to help farmers with programs of adjustment and conservation. State legislatures acted to supplement these programs.

Agriculture had come to a point where the efforts of each individual farmer struggling to improve his own income did not add up to the greatest good for farmers as a group, nor for the Nation. As a result, farmers realized that they had to act together, in many new ways, if they were to help themselves.

Prepared by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in cooperation with the Extension Service, the Farm Security Administration, the Soil Conservation Service, and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, United States Department of Agriculture.

Broad-Scale Action Calls for Planning.

Under the new legislation Government accepted two responsibilities. One was to assist farm families in finding security and a good standard of living; the other was to maintain the Nation's agricultural plant and its production at a level high enough to supply abundantly the needs of all the people.

Broad-scale planning is necessary, of course, in all cases where broad-scale action is involved. That is the reason for agricultural planning in its various phases, including the county land use planning program. Briefly, present agricultural planning activity—county land use planning—is a cooperative effort of all interested agencies, and especially of the farmers themselves, to do in a thoroughly democratic way the planning that is needed.

More specifically, this is a joint effort by representative farmers in each locality and State, the agencies of the Department of Agriculture, the Land-Grant Colleges, and related State and local agencies. Its purpose is to provide a democratic means for developing and continuously improving agricultural plans and policies within the framework authorized by Congress. These plans and proposals will help tie together the various agricultural programs and related public activities, will increase their effectiveness in promoting long-time as well as emergency objectives in agriculture, and assist in developing additional programs where needed.

It is recognized, to be sure, that agricultural land use planning reaches out into very broad fields. By the term land use planning it is not meant that such planning restricts itself to planning in any narrow sphere of effort. To begin with, the "human side" of agricultural problems is definitely within such planning. Land is used by people, and land use cannot be planned without taking the people into account. Similarly, there are many points at which this type of planning touches upon industrial, urban, and other fields of interest, such as those with which other than agricultural agencies of State and Federal Governments are concerned. In these instances, provision is made for working as closely as possible with planners in the other fields, but meanwhile agriculture has its own job to do. Therefore, the Department of Agriculture and the Land-Grant Colleges have accepted responsibility for helping farmers to plan.

Farmer Planning Old and New.

Making plans is nothing new to a farmer. He is more of a planner, perhaps, than anybody else, if for no other reason than that the seasons force him to look months into the future for the fruits of his toil. He makes up his mind what to plant, how much to plant, and where his various crops are to be located. He figures out his feed and livestock needs. He plans where to put fences, terraces, and wood lots. He works out his marketing plans. That is planning by one farmer for his particular farm. It is the type of planning that the individual can do as an individual.

The procedure for group planning with his neighbors is also familiar to him. His experience dates back to the Pilgrim Fathers, who had hardly stepped off Plymouth Rock before they called a meeting to plan the use of their new land. In Virginia, a few years later, the pioneer tobacco planters got together and decided to cut down production so they could receive higher prices. These are but two examples of early planning in agriculture. Many others could be cited.

County agents for many years have been helping to bring farmers together to talk over their problems and decide what could be done about them. By working together farmers have been able to begin group action in solving many of their problems, such as is possible through cooperative marketing and purchasing associations, cooperative credit organizations, threshing groups, bull rings, etc.

What, then, is the difference between this kind of group planning and the present program of agricultural land use planning? There are many similarities, of course, but there are fundamental differences, too; differences that lie primarily in the methods used, the types of problems to be attacked, and in the tools available for working on them.

Type of Problems Previously Emphasized.

Up to now, farmer planning has emphasized those problems, notably in production and marketing, which the individual acting alone or through small groups of neighbors, could cope with successfully. The success of this kind of planning is dependent upon the farmer or his group possessing a large degree of actual control over the factors that create, or that can alleviate, the conditions he is concerned about. The farmer seeks to gain this control when he takes part in cooperative purchasing, marketing, threshing, and similar ventures. In these activities, as in others, he seeks to bring to bear on his problems the results of scientific research in

agriculture and the use of new crops or varieties that become available, and he gains the help of the Extension Service. This type of planning is important. It has played a vital part in the past and will continue to be essential in the future.

But what about the problems that the individual farmer, or the farmers in his neighborhood, cannot control in this way? What do we know about the extent, causes, and solutions of the problems that this individual and even the farmers in a particular area have not been able to consider up to this time? What about the tax problems that may require study on a State-wide basis, flood-control problems of regional scope, or even great national problems? The solution of these, in many areas, is as closely related to the farmer's pocketbook as is a registered bull or a seed variety.

How can he work with his neighbors and local-government officials in planning use of cut-over and abandoned areas so that flood and silt damages will be reduced and so that individual farms within the area can still continue most effective operations? What can he and his neighbors do collectively, with State and Federal aid, about soil erosion and depletion, reforestation of cut-over areas, and public land policies? And about prices, marketing facilities, road costs, taxation, farm tenancy, rehabilitation, credit, school costs, the high costs of relief, and the multitude of other interlocking factors that affect his family, his community, and the Nation? Planning is needed here, just as it is in the case of the simpler problems, but it must be in a somewhat different form.

Many New Tasks Given to Public Agencies.

To deal with these problems of greater than individual farm significance, many new responsibilities have been given to State and Federal agricultural agencies in the last few years, and these agencies have begun developing the new kinds of service needed in agriculture, as well as making old services more effective. Through participation in these programs farmers now are better equipped than ever before to deal with agricultural problems through group efforts.

The land use planning program recognizes the value of planning for individual farm efficiency. But during the last 10 years farmers in various parts of the United States have come to realize that individual farm planning by itself is not the answer to such *area* problems as tax delinquency and harmful land use. Soil-erosion problems are *area* problems, as well as individual farm problems and are directly related to the farmer's pocketbook in that he wants to get the best

possible control for the least money. Working by himself, the individual farmer often has been unable, for instance, to cope with *area* erosion problems, so farmers began to say that if all the farmers in such and such an *area* would *get together* they could not only control erosion better, but their out-of-pocket expenses would be smaller and their returns greater.

Organization and Guidance Sought for Work.

Agricultural land use planning tries to establish machinery so rural people can help organize and guide service programs in each area toward their most effective and democratic uses.

The service of the new programs to agriculture and the Nation cannot be of most value when the work is done piecemeal—each program unrelated to the others. Nor can agencies and programs follow patterns that will always be the same in every county or area. Conditions and needs vary from county to county. The same applies to States and regions, and the best way of getting effective action that will fit the needs of each community, county, and region is to have the farmer and his neighbors take part in planning the programs for each area. Participating with technicians and program administrators in his county-planning group, the farmer can make a valuable contribution, because his knowledge and experience concerning local conditions and problems provide a practical basis for analyzing the needs of his area.

In land use planning these local people—farmers and program administrators—can meet together for discussion of their common problems. In addition they can obtain full technical assistance in surveying and analyzing the forces at work in the locality. This is always helpful to a group in formulating and agreeing upon recommendations about their problems. The conclusions that are drawn then serve as guides to farmers and public agencies; not only in purely local activities, for they also reach out into State, regional and national spheres.

Backgrounds of Present Planning Work.

Perhaps it will help to look at the kinds of problems county planning is dealing with and the reasons why some of them arose. Part of the farmer's ills have sprung up in the last few years; others come down from pioneer days. Troubles have been piling up for many years, but agriculture was growing, there was good free land for the taking, population of the country was soaring and making an ever-grow-

ing market for farm products, and Europe, to which we owed money, was taking farm exports in payment.

With the World War the picture changed all around. The cry went up for farm products to clothe and feed the soldiers in the trenches, and, for a few years afterward, to feed and clothe the European nations while they rebuilt their war-torn lands. More and more acres were planted, more and more land was laid bare to the winds and the rain. Meanwhile, the good free land had disappeared: the American geographic frontier was gone.

Then came the years after the war. Europe, unable to pay, turned to growing its own crops. Prices hit the slide. Industries shut down. Banks crashed. Farms were foreclosed. The expanding farm population had no new land to go to. The displacement of farm labor by machinery contributed its share of ills. Mortgage moratoriums, farmers' strikes, panic prices, people homeless and hungry in the lap of plenty—that was how things were when, in 1933, Congress appropriated money directly to the Secretary of Agriculture to speed aid to farmers. This had been done in minor emergencies before but never on the scale of 1933.

New Agencies Established To Do New Work.

New agencies were established. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration began its job of bringing supply and demand into balance. Within a short time, rural rehabilitation and resettlement work was started. The Soil Conservation Service was formed; the Farm Credit Administration, Farm Security Administration, Commodity Credit Corporation, Surplus Commodities Corporation, and others were created, all to deal with the problems of farmers. In addition, the older agencies of the Department of Agriculture brought their work to bear more directly on the social and economic ills of the farmer. Thus began Government action to help farmers directly; a program of action that was the answer to many years of demands by farmers themselves.

The fact that some of the farm programs were created in a time of hurry and bustle explains why greater emphasis must now be given to making them work more closely together when they get to the land, for there was not always time and sufficient information to permit planning them in detail before starting the work. Even if they had been set up more slowly, it would still be necessary to make sure that these programs are in harmony when operations in the county are undertaken. This is one of the most important jobs that the

county land use planning program is designed to do: To help each of these programs to tie in with all the others to form an agricultural program that is well coordinated when it reaches the county, the neighborhood, and the farm.

Piece-by-Piece Attack Not Most Effective.

Through these programs and in other ways farmers have been working together a good deal, but they have been trying to get at their troubles on a piece-by-piece basis. The right way is for all concerned—farmers and public agencies alike—to take part in a joint and continuous attack on the whole set of problems. Some farm problems are individual farm problems, some are community propositions, some are State and some national in scope. To attack them one at a time, as if every ailment were independent of the others, doesn't make sense.

This, then, is one of the important reasons for land use planning: To tie together the State and Federal programs into a unified attack on the problems of each community. There are a good many others, and important among them is the Department's intention to push even farther its policy of building its programs around recommendations based upon farmers' own factual knowledge and experience with their problems. The Department also wants to clarify and improve its working relations with the States; it wants to bring its research as closely as possible into line with the needs of farmers; it wants to make the taxpayer's money go as far as possible; and it wants to carry out its programs in a truly democratic fashion, based on the maximum of local and State cooperation in shaping farm programs.

Machinery for Land Use Planning.

To do these things, some machinery is needed. The land use planning machinery starts with the organization and work of community and county committees of farmers. Farmers are a definite majority on all county and community committees—generally, community committees are made up entirely of farmers. Farmers have a majority membership on the county committee, which includes at least 10 farm men and women, and may include several forest owners in counties where there are forestry problems. At least one member of the county AAA committee is a member of the county group, as well as the representatives of State and Department agencies operating in the county that deal with land use or closely related programs.

The State committee's membership includes at least one farmer or farm woman from each of the major farming areas of the State. Other members are the director of extension, the director of the experiment station, the State representative of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, and someone from each State or Department of Agriculture agency managing land use programs in the State. A direct connection between the county and State committees and the Department of Agriculture in Washington is furnished through the Extension Service and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics.

The membership of the planning committee, needless to say, is an important factor in assuring the success of planning. For that reason it is essential that the committee be representative of all agricultural groups in the county, including local representatives of public agricultural agencies and representative farm owners, tenants, sharecroppers, and laborers. This is very important because the conclusions of the local planning group, if they are to be used as a basis for action, must not only reflect the opinions of the committee that drafted them, but in addition must express the sentiment of a large proportion of the farm population in the county. A committee that is not representative cannot speak for all farmers.

By participation in local planning efforts, representatives of public agencies receive first-hand knowledge of the farmer's needs and problems. On the other hand, they give valuable aid to farmer members about the work their agencies carry on in the county and about the modifications possible for each program.

Work of the Planning Committees.

The first job of the community or county committees is to study and identify the physical and economic differences between the land use areas of the county. They use such help as is needed from the Department of Agriculture people, Extension Service workers, and farm-program leaders. The committees then determine the extent and character of these land use problems. As a basis for, and as an aid in, analyzing the factors involved in these problems, they develop maps, and they have discussions concerning the information and the conclusions reached about the county's problems in relation to the basic pattern of land use in the county.

The complete maps and reports will show, among other things, the present land use areas, where the forest land lies, and the location of cut-over land, roads, and schools. They

will provide a clear idea of the settlement pattern in the county, as well as give an indication of the problems within each area. The reports will express conclusions as to what changes may be needed in the kinds of farming and sizes of farms in each land use area; what land should be reserved for forestry, for wildlife, or for recreation; and in what areas settlement should be encouraged or discouraged. They may go into such questions as desirable new farming practices; the need for new kinds of crops, for new markets, or perhaps for changes in the county system of roads or schools; or they may touch on other improvements the committee decides are needed.

In addition the reports will describe how the committee thinks these changes can be brought about. For example the committee may have reasons to make recommendations regarding the programs of the Department of Agriculture that now are operating in the county or that may be needed in the future. It may see and suggest possibilities of changes in those programs or in program procedures and regulations. Careful study will be made by the committee of the programs and their existing application to the county before changes are suggested. In other instances, it may wish to recommend action or study by the State or the county to deal with specific problems; or it may have developed enough evidence to show changes it thinks individual farmers in the county or community can accomplish just by working together.

Nature of Recommendations by Committees.

The committee's recommendations for land use adjustments are an all-important phase of this planning work. These provide guidance and help to all public programs in agriculture. The planning committee's work does not end with recommendations, however, but extends into every field of agricultural action. Working and conferring constantly with program leaders, the county committee exerts direct influence in dealing with a host of specific problems that confront public agencies. It is capable of initiating many types of group and public action in the community and county spheres. Furthermore, it is the committee's task to keep its people informed of the recommendations made and of the reasons underlying them.

When an analysis and a resulting group of recommendations have been worked out by the county committee, they are presented in preliminary form to the State Land-Use

Planning Committee, so that the needs of all areas can be considered in plans for the State. Community, county, and State planning groups face the need for continuous activity from the very beginning, of course; because planning, coordination, and appraisal of public programs in agriculture must themselves be continuous.

The success of the committee's work, in some cases, will depend on action within the county. For instance, if after sufficient deliberation, a committee believes rural land should be zoned to stop new people from settling in a district where they couldn't make a living, and where settlement creates high cost for schools, roads, and other services, zoning is plainly something for the county and community committees to work on in those States that have acts authorizing county zoning ordinances.

Action by State Committee Has Broader Scope.

On the other hand, the State committee is concerned when it comes to choosing the most logical area within a State for the Government to buy land, perhaps extending into several counties, so that submarginal cropland can be restored to grass or forests and better use of land can be encouraged. In a case like this, the State Land-Use Planning Committee, assisted by the joint BAE-Land Grant College Committee—a 3-man group for coordination of planning and research work—will help to select the purchase areas on the basis of State-wide needs, as well as the needs of the particular county or community. Then, too, the State Land-Use Planning Committee may be the logical unit to assist in getting any needed State legislation.

Some programs—such as flood control, water development, submarginal-land purchase, tax equalization, and zoning—have *broader* than *individual county* significance. As with the individual farmer, who, we have seen, was unable to cope with the erosion problems that lay outside of his farm boundaries without the cooperation and understanding of his neighbors, so it may be with counties when these programs are involved. Not all such problems in an area can be handled at once. Therefore, to avoid duplication and confusion in work, the State Land-Use Planning Committee and the BAE-Land Grant College Committee serve as the machinery to handle the broader type of planning activities, by bringing technicians, farmers, and administrators together at the State level.

Finally, the formation of important national farm policies will be influenced greatly by the conclusions of farmers who participate in county planning work. Facilities are available through land use planning whereby farmer opinion can be brought to bear more effectively in the formulation of agricultural policies.

Examples of Problems Facing Committees.

Among the problems that may confront the county committee are whether certain submarginal land should be shifted from crops to pasture or woodland, what to do about farmers who are in need of income from other sources than farming, or what can be done to control floods. Other problems may include needed changes in sizes of farms or the advisability of preventing settlement on isolated farms that require roads and schools at too high a cost; how changes in taxation can encourage better land use and equalize present tax burdens; how to improve public-health programs and education; the advisability of consolidating small but relatively costly rural schools; and whether improvement of highways and roads in certain areas will encourage or discourage land uses in line with the long-time goals of the area. These are just some of the problems that county committees may have to deal with as a start toward a better adjusted agriculture.

In viewing changes that may be needed in the action programs of the Department now operating in its county, the committee may properly consider the part that AAA acreage allotments, for instance, play in the farming of the county and what purposes the payments should serve. Or it may conclude that soil conservation districts should be formed, or that grazing districts are desirable, and may initiate action for their establishment. Perhaps it may ask Federal or State purchase of land in certain areas or perhaps community forests or pastures can be encouraged, so that land can be put to new and sounder use. Perhaps the committee will see the desirability of some change in the present program of tenant-purchase loans by the FSA, or in the way the rehabilitation loans are made. In another direction, it may conclude that additions to national forests and better protection of wildlife can be achieved, or that changes in the policies of other credit agencies are desirable.

Wide Farmer Participation Essential in Planning.

Having farmers participate in planning means a lot of work, and some people are asking why the Department of Agriculture or the State colleges, for instance, should not

send technicians into a county, make the surveys, figure out scientifically what the county's plans ought to be, and then just announce the results.

The reasons are plain: In the first place, the "hand-me-down" idea of doing things is not the way of a democracy; and, in the second, this is simply not a job for technicians alone. It is one for the joint concern of farmers, technicians, and program administrators. And the key to success in the entire task is to obtain the benefit of local knowledge and opinions about local problems and conditions, together with local support and participation in planning agricultural programs and goals.



If the county planning program is not already operating in your county, and if you and other farmers are interested in starting and participating in it, your county agent will be glad to cooperate with you in beginning the planning task, and he can supply any additional information that may be needed.